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ABSTRACT

In this lesson, students compare imagined travel experiences of their own with the actual experiences of 19th-century pioneers. To learn about the experiences of the emigrants who traveled the Oregon Trial, the lesson asks students to create, as a class, oral stories about contemporary cross-country journeys; they then create works of historical fiction in the form of picture books, drawing upon the information they have learned. The lesson plan contains a guiding question and material on how to prepare to teach the lesson. It also contains suggested activities for these lessons: Lesson 1: Setting the Scene; Lesson 2: Traveling on the Oregon Trail; Lesson 3: Putting It All Together; and Extending the Lesson. The lesson plan provides detailed information and ideas for teaching each lesson; cites learning objectives; gives appropriate grade levels and the approximate length of time required for each lesson; and outlines national standards for literature and language arts, United States history, geography, and visual arts covered in the lessons. (Lists 11 related Internet links.) (NKA)

ED 455 516

If You Were a Pioneer on the Oregon Trail

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the Council of the Great City Schools, the WorldCom Foundation,
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If You Were a Pioneer on the Oregon Trail

Pioneer Reenactment
Courtesy of The National Archives

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Introduction

A 2,000-mile trek across a continent—with no idea what awaits you on the other side. Tell your students to put on their traveling shoes and prepare for the journey of their lives!

In this lesson, students compare imagined travel experiences of their own with the actual experiences of 19th-century pioneers. After creating, as a class, oral stories about contemporary cross-country journeys, students learn about the experiences of the emigrants who traveled on the Oregon Trail. They then create works of historical fiction in the form of picture books, drawing upon the information they have learned.

Guiding Question: What was it like to travel west on the Oregon Trail? How has the experience of travel changed over the course of the last 150 years?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will have:

- Learn about the pioneer experience on the Oregon Trail.
- Compared and contrasted modern day travel experiences with those of the 19th century.
- Synthesized historical data through a creative project.

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

- Before the lesson, explore what students already know about pioneers. Who were they? With what period in history are they associated? Where did they come from? Where did they go, and why? For background information, visit the EDSITEment-reviewed website The Oregon Trail.

SUBJECT AREAS
Literature & Language Arts: American
Literature & Language Arts: Fiction
History: U.S.: The West

GRADE LEVELS
K-2

TIME REQUIRED
One to four class periods.

SKILLS
observation and description
comparing and contrasting
critical thinking
historical analysis
creative writing
visual art
collaboration

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

4 5

- Explain to students that they are now going to imagine themselves as modern-day pioneers. On a map of the United States, show students a state far away from their home state. A large selection of maps is available in the Atlas section of the EDSITEment-reviewed National Geographic Society Xpeditions website. In the Atlas section, click on North America for a current map of the United States.

- Tell students to imagine that they are going to move to this distant state one month from now. Have students brainstorm a list of questions about the trip (e.g., How will I get there? With whom will I travel? How long will it take to get there? What can I take with me? How will I feel about going on this trip?). Compile all of their questions in a master list; save the list so students may refer to it later.

- In round-robin fashion, with each student contributing a sentence, have the class create a story about their imagined cross-country trip. If a student gets stuck for ideas, you may prompt them with a question from the master list of questions for inspiration. Write the story in large print on chart paper so that you can refer to it later.

Suggested Activities

Lesson 1: Setting the Scene
Lesson 2: Traveling on the Oregon Trail
Lesson 3: Putting It All Together

Extending the Lesson

LESSON 1
Setting the Scene

Explain to students that they are now going to learn about the experiences of people who really did move across the country—the pioneers who traveled west on the Oregon Trail in the 1840s. Show them a map of the route the emigrants traveled, available on the EDSITEment-reviewed website The Oregon Trail. Click on Historic Sites on the Trail to view the entire route; then click on each state for a close-up view.

In order to give students a feeling for the period of history they are about to enter, you may also wish to show them some photographic images. In addition to images included on The Oregon Trail website, a series of photographs from a re-enactment of the Trail experience are available through the EDSITEment-reviewed website The Digital Classroom. To access these images, go to the Digital Classroom, scroll down the left-hand side of the screen to "Other NARA Sites for Primary Sources" and select NAIL from this list. Now click on "Search for Archival Holdings." Next, click on "NAIL Digital Copies Search." In the blank space next to the instruction "Enter Keywords," type in the words "Oregon Trail." Scroll down the boxed list titled "Media" and select "Photographs and Graphic Materials." Finally, click on "Display Results" to view the re-enactment photos.

National Council for the Social Studies

2. Time, Continuity, and Change (more)

National Geography Standards

9. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations (more)
12. The processes, patterns, and function of human settlement (more)
13. How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of the Earth's surface (more)
17. How to apply geography to interpret the past (more)

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements... (more)
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. (more)
8. Students use a variety

If you have limited computer access in your classroom, you may want to print out some photographs to distribute to students. To make a copy, click on the desired photograph and hold your cursor down until a list of options appears. After selecting "Copy this image," you may post the image into a word processing document and print it out as you would any other document.

As students view each image, ask them what they notice about details such as people, clothing, transportation and setting. What does each photograph reveal about the experiences of the pioneers who traveled west on the Oregon Trail?

LESSON 2

Traveling on the Oregon Trail

Using the students' questions (see "Preparing to Teach") as a starting point, describe the experiences of the 19th century emigrants who traveled on the Oregon Trail. You can research this information ahead of time using the Oregon Trail website. Click on Jumping Off to access useful and entertaining information about the following topics:

- "Jumping Off Cities" lists the places where emigrants, many of whom initially traveled the Missouri River by steamship, would "jump off" before the river made a turn to the north.
- Waiting tells how thousands of pioneers delayed their journeys until the grass (necessary for feeding their animals along the way) had started to grow.
- Supplies describes the amount of food a family would need in order to survive on the Trail.
- Wagons offers a detailed description of the farm wagons that most emigrants used for the westward journey.
- Congestion describes the traffic jams that delayed the start of the pioneers' journeys.
- Overpacking recounts how emigrants would simply throw things off their wagons when they realized they had brought along too much for their journeys.

"All About the Oregon Trail" also offers detailed information on the following topics:

- The Route West describes the 2,000-mile journey across the country.
- Power explains why emigrants chose mules or oxen to pull their wagons.
- Hardships describes some of the physical risks of the journey, such as fatigue, accidents, storms, disease, and dangerous river crossings.
- Camping documents the daily routine of trail life.
- Buffalo describes the emigrants' encounters with herds of buffalo along the Trail.
- Native Americans recounts both friendly and unfriendly meetings with Native American people.

Finally, "Fantastic Facts about the Oregon Trail" contains a wealth of odd tidbits that are bound to appeal to young imaginations. Each of these sections also includes photographs that can be shared with the class.

For a narrative account, you may wish to read *Westward Ho with Ollie Ox!*, by Melanie Richardson Dundy (South Beach, OR: MDCT Publishing, 1999), a picture book written for 4-8 year olds.

For first-hand accounts of the experiences of some of the pioneers who traveled the Oregon Trail, visit the Trail Archive section of the Oregon Trail website. Here you can access a selection of diaries, letters and memoirs.

of technological and information resources... (more)

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes. (more)

National Standards for Arts Education: Visual Arts

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes (more)
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas (more)

View your state's standards

Excerpts from Harriet Scott Palmer's memoir, Catherine Sager Pringle's diary, or the journals of Narcissa Whitman are likely to be particularly fascinating to young children. As you read the excerpts together, you may ask students to note the similarities and differences in these first-hand accounts.

After students have learned about pioneers' real-life experiences of traveling on the Oregon Trail, have them compare these experiences to those they imagined in the travel story they created as a class (see "Preparing to Teach"). In what ways were their experiences similar? In what ways were they different? Would students have wanted to travel as pioneers on the Oregon Trail? Why or why not?

LESSON 3

Putting It All Together

Have older students write a story about the experiences of a 19th century family traveling on the Oregon Trail. Teachers of younger students (K-1) may wish to have the class create one story together, with each student contributing one sentence (as in Step 1). Each student may write his or her sentence on a sheet of paper and illustrate it; these pages may then be put together to form a complete picture book. Teachers of older students (grade 2) may wish to have each student write and illustrate his or her own story.

Extending the Lesson

Based on pictures and descriptions available through The Oregon Trail website, have students work in groups to create dioramas depicting events that could have happened along the Oregon Trail. Students may wish to use their own Oregon Trail stories for inspiration.

Links to EDSITEment Participating Websites

The Oregon Trail
http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/Oregontrail.html

- The Oregon Trial "Jumping Off"
  http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Jumpingoff.html
- The Oregon Trial "All About the Oregon Trail"
  http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Allabout.html
- Trail Archive
  http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/00.n.trailarchive.html
- Harriet Scott Palmer
  http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/00.ar.palmer.html
- Catherine Sager Pringle
  http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/00.ar.sager1.html
- Narcissa Whitman
  http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/00.ar.whitman1.html

The Digital Classroom
http://www.nara.gov/education/

- NARA Archival Information Locator (NAIL)
  http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html

National Geographic Society Xpeditions
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/main.html

- Xpeditions Atlas Section
  http://http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/nammenu.html